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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to determine if men dominated classroom participation in an adult professional training setting. A literature review identified a number of studies exploring classroom participation based on gender, but no study within a training environment was identified. The study was conducted in a mandatory sales training course, called Pro Training, in which new residential sales associates were prepared for their profession. The trainer of the 4-week course was a male. The training methodology included small group discussion, case studies, role playing, and review of the course manual, though lecture methodology predominated. Class participation was encouraged. Participants were 17 women (47 percent) and 19 men (53 percent). Data were collected during 6 hours of classroom activity recorded on audiotape. Actual time was tallied according to gender when a participant asked a question, answered a question, and made a statement. Data were analyzed according to the number of participations and length of participation in seconds. Study results were not consistent with previous findings: men and women participated equally. Men participated 268 times (50.5 percent); women participated 263 times (49.5 percent). Similar levels of participation may have been accounted for by the professional environment, older women, and more acceptance of ambiguous answers. (YLB)

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TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTER

Project Number Forty-Six

THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER ON PARTICIPATION IN AN ADULT PROFESSIONAL TRAINING SETTING: A PILOT STUDY

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The Influence of Gender on Participation in an Adult Professional Training Setting: A Pilot Study

Catherine Krupnick found at Harvard University and Wheaton College that men undergraduates dominated classroom discussion, speaking up to twelve times longer than women students (Hanson, 1989). This was the case even when men were in the minority, as they were at Wheaton. Men and women participated equally only in predominantly female classes taught by women. Such findings generated interest in undertaking a similar study in an adult professional training setting to determine if such patterns also exist there.

Literature Review

A review of the literature identified a number of studies exploring classroom participation based on gender, but no study within a training environment was identified. Gender-related studies have focused on teacher gender stereotypes, teacher expectations of students based on gender, male-female class ratios, and gender-based learning styles, among others, in addition to participation based on gender.

Banks (1988) found that gender was a significant influence on student participation in law school classrooms. Classroom environment, structure and language tended to exclude women from

participation or to make them feel inferior. DeBoer (1984) found that men dominated discussion in science and mathematics courses, regardless of the gender of the teacher. The differences were most marked in interactions in large groups in which both men and women participated. Rennie and Parker (1987) determined that the differences could be reduced in science laboratory classes when teachers are alerted to possibilities of sexism in the physical sciences. Similar results occurred in studies by Brunson (1983) in introductory math courses and Linn (1985) and Chen (1986) in computer classes. Brunson does suggest that age and life experiences of students tend to reduce the differences in participation rates.

Methodology

The study was conducted in a mandatory sales training course conducted by Edina Realty, called Pro Training. The purpose of the training was to train and prepare new Edina Realty residential sales associates for their profession. The course was a four-week course which occurred three days each week for approximately eight hours each day. The trainer, a male, was a former salesperson with twenty years of experience, including five years as a training instructor. The methodology of the training included small group discussion, case studies, role playing, and review of the course manual, though lecture methodology predominated. Class participation was encouraged throughout the course. All participants had completed the State's pre-licensing course, consisting of 150 hours of

training, and passed the Minnesota state real estate licensing exam.

Participants consisted of 17 women and 19 men. Two absences a day was maximum. Participants ranged from 25 to 65 years of age, with the average age of 45. The background of the participants was also varied, including teachers, mortgage bankers, accountants, business owners, retirees, and recent college graduates.

The data for the study were collected during six hours of classroom activity which was recorded on audio tape. The taping occurred for two hours a day for three days during the third week of the course. Three separate taping times were selected to cover a variety of content. The third week of the training was chosen as the point at which participants would have established familiarity and comfort with the instructor, participants and procedures. Audio tape was chosen over video tape as a less intrusive methodology while still providing all of the data needed for analysis.

Actual time was tallied according to gender when (1) a participant asked a question, (2) a participant answered a question, and (2) a participant made a statement. A separate tally was made of the time when both female and male trainees answered a question simultaneously. Data were analyzed according to the number of participations and the length of the participation in seconds.

The limitations of the study included:

- o only one training course was included,
- o the content of the course was sales only,
- o there was only one instructor, who was a male, and
- o only six hours of interaction were taped.

As a pilot study, however, the methodology was appropriate.

Results

The results of the study are not consistent with previous findings; men and women participated equally.

Total number of participations

Men participated 268 times (50.5%) while women participated 263 times (49.5%). Thus, men participated slightly less than their representation in the training (53%), whereas women participated slightly more than their representation (47%).

Average length of participation

The average participation time for men was 4.1 seconds, whereas women averaged 3.7 seconds per participation. This difference was not statistically significant.

Discussion

Similar levels of participation may be accounted for in a number of ways. First, the course is a professional training environment in which both men and women are motivated to learn the subject information for career success. Second, older women may be more accepting of their abilities and be more confident of

their competence and intelligence. The previous studies were of younger women during a time of their lives when socialization and acceptance is a predominant force in shaping their behavior. Third, in a professional training environment, there are many possible correct answers, and ambiguity may be more widely accepted than in college classrooms, especially those dealing with the "hard" sciences. Participants are required to make judgment calls based on both the course content and life experiences. This may reinforce a wider variety of learning styles than the traditional academic setting and give women greater confidence in their responses.

This study found, contrary to expectations, and contrary to what has been found in college classes, that there was equal participation of men and women in this adult professional training classroom. Further research in a broader number of training settings is needed to determine the pattern of gender-based participation of adult learners. Additionally, it would be helpful to design studies to explore what factors contribute to the equal participation rate. Learning these factors may provide models for improving the classroom environment for younger women.

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